

Rockledge  
Occoquan  
Prince William County, Virginia

HABS No. VA-577

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Washington Office, Division of Design and Construction  
Washington 25, D. C.

"Rockledge" (The Den)  
Occoquan, Prince William County  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-577

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"Rockledge" (The Den)

Present Owner: L. A. Barnes

Notes  
Barnes - 1/10/8

Present Occupant and Use: Part-time residence of Owner.

Description: House site is carved out of a rocky ledge, hence the name. In front there were small garden terraces. Building and retaining walls are fieldstone. The main block is two-and-a-half stories with gable roof and dormers. Chimneys are of brick, likewise the one-and-a-half storied wing and spring house. This wing on kitchen appears to have been subsequently joined to the main building. It still contains bake ovens where the owner's flour was baked into bread and biscuits for commercial distribution,

The house is distinguished by its bold and handsome modillion cornice across the front. Inside there is simple woodwork comprising six conventional mantels, chair rails, baseboard and cornices in the principal rooms.

Historical Data:

Year of erection: 1760 and 1761 (later enlarged, probably by Ellicott.)

Built for: John Ballendine, close friend of George Mason, mill owner and ironmaster.

Architect: William Buckland. Rockledge was one of the few stone residences he was associated with and it was one of the first commissions he undertook after leaving Gunston Hall.

Other Associations: The grist mill at Occoquan was justly celebrated and Rockledge was the home of builder, John Ballendine and later of Thomas Ellicott who developed Merchant's Mill (q.v.) to such a high state late in the 18th century. The Ellicott family imported an English tutor, John Davis, to superintend the education of their children. Davis kept an extraordinarily interesting and colorful diary. "Occoquan", he wrote, "consists of a house built on a rock, three others on the river side, and a half

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dozen log huts scattered at some distance.  
He found the settlement "romantic beyond conception" and spoke of the hills as "mountains".

References:

Rosamond Randall Beirne and John Henry Scarff,  
William Buckland 1734-1774, Architect of Virginia and Maryland, Baltimore, 1958.

John Davis, Travels of Four-Years-and-a-Half in the United States of America during 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, and 1802. New York, 1909.

Prepared by: Russell Jones and Worth Bailey, HABS, National Park Service, April, 1959.

Approved: Dick Lutton Date 7/9/59  
Chief Architect

"Rockledge" (The Den)  
Occoquan, Prince William County  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-577

"Rockledge"

Present Owner: Lawrence A. Barnes

Present Occupant and Use: Until recently the residence of Owner.

Because of blasting operations in the Quarry just opposite, in Fairfax County, the building has become unsafe for habitation.

Description: House site is carved out of a rocky ledge hence the name. In front there were small garden terracea. Building and retaining walls are fieldstone. The main block is two and a half stories with gable roof and thin, Williamsburg-type dormers. Chimneys are of brick, likewise the one-and-a-half-atoried wing and springhouse. In plan the house is one-room deep. This wing or kitchen appear to have been subsequently joined to the main building. At the rear of this juncture occurs a part-gambrel roof which gives headroom to a service stair and access to the hillside. It is reported that there was formerly a bridge outside the dormered door leading to a hillside necessary.

The lintel in the kitchen fireplace is probably one of the most interesting details in the house. It is not wood, but cast-iron and in the center of the chamfered section some foundry workman immortalized palm and fingers with his imprint. The chimney opening and adjoining bake oven have been considerably worked-over.

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Examination of the oven suggests that it originally was constructed with projecting exterior dome.

"Rockledge" is distinguished by its bold mass, pleasing proportions, and the handsome modillion and fret cornice stretching across the front. Inside the woodwork is simple though well designed, as indicated by the photographs. Ballendine, it is recalled, was a big league operator with limited resources. Ellicott, though prosperous, was a Quaker scorning ostentation. The house still exhibits a quantity of wrought-iron hardware, notably the well-designed crane in the kitchen fireplace. It is of collateral interest along with the cast-iron lintel, that the house formerly retained a number of heavy cast-iron slabs, undoubtedly used as fireplace linings. Ruins of the early ironworks are still pointed out by old residents within an area restricted by the Water Company.

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John Davis, Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America during 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, and 1802. New York, 1909.

Prepared by: Worth Bailey, Architectural Historian, HABS, February, 1961.

Approved by:

*Robert E. Smith*  
Chief Architect

Date 2-27-61